

Restaurant owners were not told to install ventilation systems

Andrew Williams' letter ("Businesses get hit twice in the pocketbook by smoking ban," Jan. 21) concerning the county's ban on smoking in eating and drinking establishments was in error in asserting that the county told restaurant owners to invest in ventilation equipment then enacted a total smoking ban.

In 1999, the County Council explicitly rejected the notion of separately ventilated smoking areas as wholly inadequate to protect restaurant workers and patrons from the known health hazards of second-hand smoke. The council instead enacted a ban on all restaurant smoking. A few restaurants then took the county to court, where the matter rested until early last year.

No one "told" restaurant owners to invest in separate ventilation systems and very few did anything of the sort, given the considerable expense involved. Indeed, the writing was on the wall for all to see: Smoking would be banned in county restaurants, sooner or later.

In fact, in the four years between 1999 and the beginning of the ban last fall, dozens of states and cities

went ahead and barred restaurant smoking. How widespread is the trend? This year smoking will no longer be permitted in all Irish pubs — in Ireland, no less. A recent poll showed that 67 percent of Marylanders favor a statewide ban on smoking in restaurants. Right now, all Maryland working men and women have the right to a smoke-free workplace — except restaurant workers.

Protecting restaurant customers and workers against second-hand smoke just makes good sense. People

have the right to smoke, but that right ends when it harms other people.

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